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*The Hebrew Collections of the Library of Congress.*—By ISRAEL SCHAPIRO, Curator of the Division of Semitic and Oriental Literature in the Library of Congress.

The Library of Congress is now practically the National Library of the United States. Owing to its marvelous growth in the last 15 years under the direction of the present Librarian, it is said already to have taken third place numerically among the great National Libraries of the world. Since the main purpose of such an institution is to supply scholars and students by national service with material necessary for their research work, it was a natural development for the Library to acquire also Collections of Semitic and Oriental literature, the more so as the number of students of Semitica and Orientalia in this country is increasing and the interest in this oldest and richest literature is continuously growing.

However, it was not until July 1, 1913, that a Division of Semitic and Oriental Literature was, by act of Congress, established in the Library of Congress. But this Division had so fine a start and the progress made in the increase of material during the three years of its existence has been so rapid that its future seems assured. Students of Semitics, who had to rely entirely on European resources, will find in the National Library abundant material for their purposes. While many branches of Semitica and Orientalia, it is true, are not at present as rich as could be desired, Hebrew literature is comprehensively as well as substantially represented, and because of the fact that the Hebrew Collections at present 'lead' the others, I shall proceed to give a survey of their material. Let me state at the outset that the collection of printed Hebrew books in the Library of Congress may already be considered the largest in this country, and that it already ranks well with the collections of the great libraries of Europe.

The large representation of Hebrew books in the Library of Congress is due chiefly to the munificence of Mr. Jacob H. Schiff of New York. The notable gift, consisting of about ten thousand books and pamphlets, which he presented to the Library in 1912, laid practically the cornerstone of the Semitic Division. This

collection was followed by another one presented by Mr. Schiff in 1914, consisting of more than 4,000 volumes. With the exception of a few hundred items of Judaica both collections consist mainly of Hebraica. A great number of Hebrew books had been in the possession of the Library, while many have been added during the last three years by purchase, copyright, gift, and exchange. Together, the number of all the Hebrew books now exceeds 18,000 volumes. Moreover, the Library possesses a few hundred Hebrew manuscripts, chiefly biblical, cabalistic, and liturgical, many of which bear a very early date and may be traced to various countries.

The importance of these Hebrew Collections is not, however, merely quantitative, but also qualitative. They cover all fields of Jewish learning and thought, religious and secular, from hoary antiquity to the present day, from the Bible to modern Hebrew literature. A great many of the books are first prints and rare specimens.

As for printed Hebrew books, the first rank, of course, is held by those printed in the 15th century, i. e. the incunabula. Bibliographical authorities do not agree as to the exact number of Hebrew books printed before 1500. But if Jacob's statement that only 101 can be traced is correct, the Library's Hebrew incunabula number now almost one-third of all incunabula known to be in existence. Among them are found the most important ones, such as: The Pentateuch with Onkelos and Rashi, Bologna, 1482; The Pentateuch, Lisbon, 1491; Nachmanides' commentary on the Pentateuch, Naples, 1490, and Levi ben Gershon's, Mantua, printed before 1482; Later Prophets with Kimchi's commentary, Guadalajara, 1482; Psalms with Kimchi, Bologna, 1477; Naples, 1487; Avicenna's Canon, Naples, 1491; Bachya ibn Pakuda's *Hoboth ha-Lebaboth*, Naples, 1489; Albo's *Ikkarim*, Soncino, 1485; Kimchi's *Shorashim*, Naples, 1491; The *Machzor*, Roman Rite, Casal Maggiore, 1486; Solomon ben Abraham Adret's *Responsa*, printed before 1480, etc.

The number of Hebrew books printed during the 15th century was small, the places of Hebrew printing in that century being confined to the Iberian and Italian peninsulas. But with the beginning of the 16th century, when printing spread into other countries and the Hebrew press increased, the production of works in Hebrew literature became prolific and vigorous.

The subject matter of the works selected for print was on the whole what might have been anticipated. First came the Bible. There is in the Hebrew Collections of the Library of Congress a long series of editions of the Bible and of parts of it, with and without commentaries, beginning with the 16th century and ending with those of recent date. Besides the well known Rabbinic Bible editions of Venice, Basle, and Amsterdam, Polyglot and Hexaglot Bibles as well as the so-called 'parallel Bibles' which give variants of the Samaritan, Septuagint and Vulgata versions, there are the notable early editions of Frobenius, Stephanus, Giustiniani, Plantin, Hutterus, etc. Very numerous are the Bibles accompanied by translation in ancient and modern languages. The commentaries of Rashi, Kimchi, Aben Ezra, Nachmanides, Gersonides, Abravanel and others are found in first print and subsequent editions. The great number of supercommentaries, culminating in Elijah Mizrachi's commentaries on Rashi, and the limitless literature of Exegetics and Homiletics of different times and lands, place the Bible section of the Hebrew Collections in first rank.

Next in volume and value is what is known as the 'Rabbinical literature.' The Mishnah is represented by quite a series of editions, containing the text only or the text with commentaries and translations, from the very first ones up to the latest Wilna edition, the text of which is accompanied by 37 commentaries. Of the Talmud there are 25 editions, including the editio prima of the Jerusalem Talmud (Venice, 1523?), the first print of the Babylonian Talmud by Bomberg (Venice, 1520-23) and the rare parts of the Constantinople edition which is supposed to have been printed about 1582. The Midrash as well is covered in all its various phases. The books relating to the Talmud fill a very large and important space in the Hebrew Collections, and include not only the commentaries, or the commentaries on the commentaries, but also the various Novellae which have been continued in an endless chain to the present day. To the Rabbinical literature belongs also the Halakah. This comprises the entire civil and ritual law and extends also to all the usages, customs, ordinances, and decrees for which there is no authority in Scripture. The works on these subjects, including the most prominent codes, as those of Alfasi, Maimonides, Jacob ben Asher, Joseph Caro, as well as the extensive Shulchan Aruch literature,

are a well cultivated branch of Rabbinical literature. In this connection may be mentioned the great body of the Responsa written by Sephardic and Ashkenazic Talmudists. The Responsa, originating in various lands during many centuries, offer a great field for research, particularly in regard to Jewish History. Indeed, the Responsa have not as yet found the appreciation they deserve.

The Hebrew Collections show an equally voluminous representation of books bearing on liturgy, ritual, religious ceremonies and practices, apologetics and polemics, and on Jewish sects. The number of various subsequent editions of the Passover Haggadah, texts, commentaries, illustrations, and translations amounts to 400, beginning with the Haggadah accompanied by Abravanel's commentary, 'Zebach Pesach,' Constantinople, 1505.

Of special note are the literary products of the 'golden renaissance' of Jewish letters under the Arab rule in the Middle Ages. They comprise the monumental theologico-philosophical works of a Saadia, Maimonides, Crescas, Albo, and the inspiring poetry of Halevy, Gabirol, Aben Ezra. The Kabbala, or Jewish mystical philosophy, is not less extensively represented.

Not taking into consideration certain other branches of Hebrew literature, whose products, although numerous, are not of particular significance, special attention is called to the very extensive store of Modern Hebrew Literature. This branch, generally known as 'Haskalah,' had its beginning and development during the period in which the Jews were allowed to participate in the life and culture of European nations. This literature has since flourished in several countries. It is mostly written in an elegant Modern Hebrew, and embraces the various subjects that are covered by the Western culture of to-day. During the last thirty years, the Hebrew language having been revived as a living tongue, particularly in the colonies and cities of Palestine, the Belles Lettres of the Modern Hebrew literature have reached the height that justly entitles them to take an honored place among the great literatures of the modern world. Many of the essayists, poets, and novelists writing Modern Hebrew have been translated into modern languages, and a great many of the modern poets and prosaists have been translated into Hebrew. Emerson, James, and Mark Twain, for instance, may be read in that language.

As individual features and characteristics of the Hebrew Collections of the Library of Congress may be quoted an excellent collection of Hebrew melodies and songs, accompanied by music, a noteworthy group of books and periodicals printed in Palestine within the last half century, and last but not least, the collection of Hebrew poetry. Almost all that has been written in Hebrew blank verse, by ancient and modern poets, is contained therein, and in view of its bulk it is highly probable that this collection is not now exceeded by any other. It also includes many Hebrew translations from modern literature. The masterly translations into Hebrew of Shakespeare, Byron, and Milton may have special mention.

The Hebraica of the Library of Congress have thus increased to a marvelous degree. The Hebrew Collections three years ago really formed a promising foundation of a Semitic Division. Taking into consideration the unprecedented development of the Library of Congress there is no doubt that the Division of Semitic and Oriental literature will expand in all of its other branches and become worthy of the great National Library of the United States.